

## Remarks by Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan

*Remarks prepared for delivery by Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan at the USDA remembrance ceremony for fallen compliance officers, June 21, 2010, Washington, DC*

Thank you, Jane.

On behalf of Secretary Vilsack and the entire U.S. Department of Agriculture, my thanks to each of you for taking time with us to remember and honor Jean Hillery, Tom Quadros, Bill Shaline and Earl Willis.

A decade after this tragedy, we continue to recognize them not only for their contributions to the nation's food safety but for the fullness of their lives.

Food safety compliance officers perform one of the most important—and unsung—functions in public service.

Safeguarding the nation's food supply is a difficult and complex job. Jean Hillery, Tom Quadros and Bill Shaline were known to take that responsibility very seriously: protecting the American people where they are largely powerless to protect themselves.

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At the time of the tragedy, the three were carrying out challenging and specialized work. They were investigating allegations that a plant was illegally operating without inspection.

While this work was critical, it was rarely considered dangerous or life-threatening. And so it's unsettling to this day to think that ... in the process of protecting American lives ... their own lives were taken so needlessly.

While we honor their contributions to the nation here in Washington, D.C., those who knew them well still remember them as individuals who delighted in the progress and purpose of their personal lives.

Jean Hillery was going to college and beginning a new career after raising three daughters. Tom Quadros worked with the Special Olympics.

These were special people. And clearly, the same qualities that made them outstanding public servants made them outstanding as well in their dedication to families and communities.

We do not forget today and we will not forget.

FSIS has honored them, as Al Almanza mentioned, in the most meaningful way possible ... by taking hard, necessary measures to ensure that this kind of tragedy never happens again.

While Al has talked about the steps that make up workplace violence prevention, I want to mention one additional aspect to food safety that the FSIS family should take great pride in.

From the start of this Administration, President Obama has been clear that food safety is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of government.

As one of the President's earliest actions, he announced the new Food Safety Working Group. The Secretary and I—with other officials—are working to meet the President's goal: to move, as one government, toward a single high standard of food safety in this country.

FSIS employees should know, too, that USDA's new research agency—the National Institute of Food and Agriculture—will focus USDA science on radically improving food safety for all Americans, among several other important goals.

And so, the noble work that's the foundation of the safety of the nation's food supply—truly the people's work—continues more important than ever.

Jean Hillery, Thomas Quadros, Bill Shaline and Earl Willis will always be part of this mission.

And the nation's progress in food safety will always be deeply a part of their legacy. We will not forget. Thank you.

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